



Report to the UCL Expeditions and Travel Committee

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Speaking in Tongues

**Around the World in One
Hundred Languages**



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PEEgE-t9z2c>



<https://tribasia.wordpress.com/>

Description of the Project

While living in Vietnam in 2013, I began a personal travel project that aims to document the diversity of languages around the world in a unique way. It aims, in its initial phase, to capture a number of identical phrases (for example, 'I love you', 'Hello, how are you?') in one hundred languages of the 6,000 currently in existence worldwide. The two main objectives of this endeavour are to highlight the disappearance of native tongues (by some accounts, languages are going extinct at a rate of one every two weeks) and to present an image of global equality, solidarity and respect. Thus far, the project has accumulated thirty seven languages and has been filmed in fifteen countries. It has spotlighted local ethnic groups that are, in several cases, facing subjugation by governments forwarding mono-linguistic policies. This has been supplemented by the filming of fellow travellers outside of their country of origin, captured, wherever possible, in locations of cultural relevance. It should be noted that I have, in all instances, filmed people with whom I established a friendship, whereas similar projects have tended to be quite rushed and impersonal – indeed, it would undoubtedly be possible to capture one hundred languages outside a major London tourist attraction in a matter of hours. Because I generally do not document my explorations through writing or photos, this doubles as a personal travel diary.

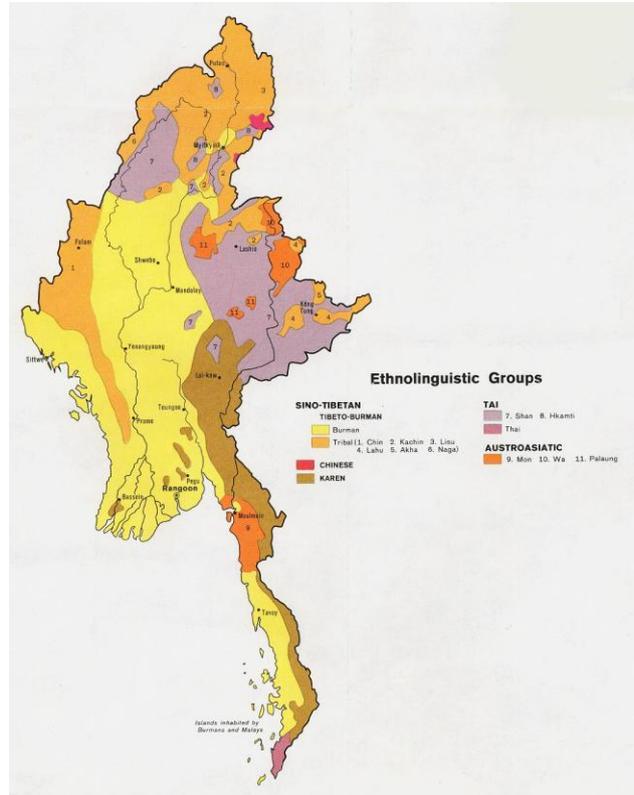
The project does not, by any means, profess to be scientific in nature, but it hopes to facilitate a fruitful language exchange will ultimately be shared with the world in a short documentary film. I envisage that this will take several years to complete but, for the purposes of this ETC application, I have made an initial edit to provide a snapshot of what is to come (please see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PEEgE-t9z2c> - 2m10s).

I am also a key contributor to a group of conscious travellers known as “Tribasia” (<https://tribasia.wordpress.com/>), which aims to raise awareness of the disappearance of micro-cultures in Asia. The group arranges free events in Europe, which they use as a platform to share their experiences. I intend to talk about the trip detailed here at their next event in London in 2016.

With the assistance of a grant of £1,300 from the ETC, I was able to survey some of the indigenous languages of Myanmar (also known as Burma) and, as an unplanned extra, parts of Malaysia. Due to the fact that the majority of ethnic groups in Myanmar do not use written forms of communication, and that state education is only provided in Burmese, several languages listed below are considered to be endangered.

Languages acquired on this trip:

- Burmese
- Palaung
- Pa'o
- Shan
- Luni
- Kachin
- Ta'ung
- Semai
- Malay



Languages filmed thus far:

Vietnamese, Korean, Welsh, Irish, Catalan, Black H'mong, Red Zao, Afrikaans, Khmer, Dutch, Laos, French, Flemish, Khmu, Armenian, Italian, Danish, Lithuania, German, Polish, Albanian, Greek, Bulgarian, Macedonian, Serbian, Russian, Belorussian, Burmese, Palaung, Pa'o, Shan, Luni, Kachin, Ta'ung, Semai, Malay and Swedish.

Travel Summary

Although Myanmar is steadily opening up to tourism, there exist many regional restrictions on travel for foreigners, which greatly limited my movements and required a flexible itinerary. For example, due to recent trouble at the Thailand-Myanmar border, I was forced to fly in and out of the country from Bangkok. Myanmar experienced serious flooding during my visit (far exceeding typical precipitation for the monsoon season), which meant that many of the roads and rivers connecting the country were impassable. I was able to visit most of the regions outlined in my original travel outline, yet because coastal regions were inaccessible by all means, I decided to spend the final week of the trip in Malaysia. Please see my approximate route:



Yangon

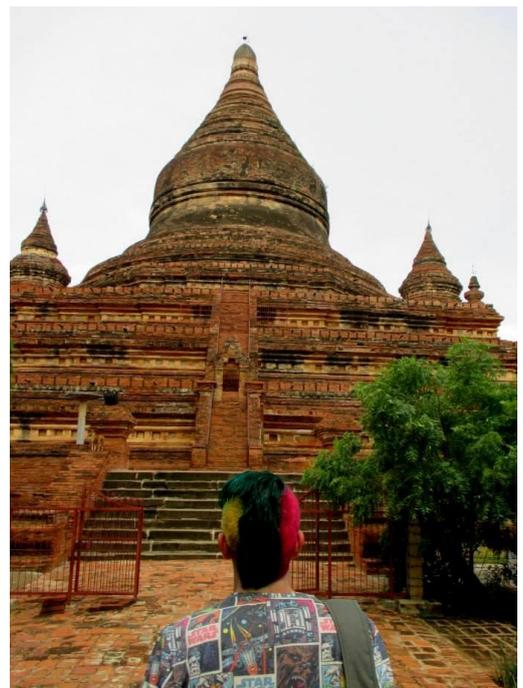
I spent a small number of days in Yangon, which I used as a hub to explore the surrounding regions in order to visit different ethnic communities, including the neighbouring town of Bago. I paid visit some of the most important religious sites in Myanmar, including the famous Shwedagon Pagoda, and other tourist sites, such as Aung San Suu Kyi's House where she was previously held under house arrest. Taking the 3-hour 'circular train' around the city, I was struck by its cultural diversity and extreme poverty – the levels of which I had not witnessed previously.



Bagan



Travelling by bus, I arrived in Bagan which is home to the largest and densest concentration of Buddhist temples, pagodas, stupas and ruins in the world (it is estimated that four thousand remain following a recent earthquake). There are several communities of Burmese and other ethnic groups that live among the temples, with whom I was able to strike up a conversation (I learnt some phrases in Burmese, but mainly communicated through gesture).



Kalaw

I then travelled to Kalaw – a British hill station during the days of colonialism. From here I embarked on a three-day hike heading east. I passed through many different villages where I was able to capture the following languages: Palaung, Pa’o, Shan, and Luni.





Inle Lake

I arrived by boat to Inle Lake, which is densely inhabited by different tribes. During my three days there I observed the local fisherman using their unique methods and visited a couple of floating markets





Mandalay

I then visited Myanmar's second biggest city before taking the train north over the famous Goteik Viaduct to arrive in another former hill station Pwin-u-lwin.

Pwin-u-lwin

Using this small town as a base, I spent several days trekking in the neighbouring valleys, visiting different ethnic groups including the Palaung and Kachin



Mrauk U

Due to the severe flooding I was not able to reach the coast and visit the Rohingya people (considered to be the worst-treated ethnic group in the world), but I did make it as far as Mrauk U – another famous religious site. From here I travelled back through Yangon and Bangkok to spend the final week in Malaysia.



Penang



Cameron Highlands



Budget

Category	Item	Provider	Expense
International Travel	<i>Return Flight: London – Bangkok</i>	Air India	496.46
Local Travel	<i>Bus: Bangkok – Yangon</i>	Vega Travel	30.43
	<i>Bus: Yangon – Naypyitaw</i>	Local Transport Companies	4.53
	<i>Bus: Naypyitaw- Bagan</i>	""	4 (approx) ³
	<i>Bus: Bagan - Mandalay</i>	""	3
	<i>Bus: Mandalay – Khakaborazi National Park (KNP)</i>	""	8
	<i>Bus: KNP - Keng Tung</i>	""	8
	<i>Bus: Keng Tung - Yangon</i>	""	4
	<i>Bus: Yangon - Bangkok</i>	Vega Travel	30.43
Visas	Thai Visa	On arrival	Free
Accommodation	Myanmar Visa ⁴	Consulate in Bangkok	34
	Yangon and Mandalay - £13.27	<i>Various:</i>	
	Bagan area - £15.89	Guesthouses	
	Most others locations - £6.62	Budget hotels	
Food	42 nights x £8.5 (average)	-	357
	42 days x £5.50	-	231
Medical (vaccinations)	Typhoid	NHS	Free
	Japanese Encephalitis	NHS	75
	Doxycycline (Malaria)	NHS	7.40
Insurance	Single Trip Essential	Insurance Republic	18.94
Other	Bagan Entry Fee	Regional Culture Authority	13.28

TOTAL: £1305.47